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Adult students protest potential loss of Pico-Union campus

March 19, 2010 | 2:33 pm

About 100 Los Angeles adult school students and some of their teachers demonstrated Friday near their campus in Pico-Union to protest its possible closing.

The Menlo Avenue site is threatened because, like some other adult-school locations, it operates out of leased space.

The leased sites assist with outreach to members of a low-income community with limited means to travel far from their neighborhood.

The adult-school division is one of many flash points as the Los Angeles Unified School District struggles to close a \$640-million deficit.

Projected budget cuts also have raised alarms among other groups, including parents worried about fewer classes for disabled students, families who could lose permits allowing students to attend schools outside L.A. Unified, teachers who could be laid off and librarians who may see their jobs disappear.

The adult division serves tens of thousands of people, including immigrants learning English and former dropouts trying to complete degrees.

The Menlo Avenue site uses 14 classrooms in a two-story building behind a private Japanese-language school. Its focus is English instruction.

"I want to help my children with their homework," said Ricardo Estrada, 31, who has made it to upper-level English by attending classes five days a week, four hours a day. "I need to learn more English to communicate with their teachers."

Blanca Perez, a 37-year-old community organizer for a nonprofit, struggled to say much the same in English, while also welcoming the chance to practice.

"I need to learn English for the future," she said.

The adult school also had its budget cut last year. Among the sharply reduced programs were enrichment classes for seniors.

A letter on the school district website asserted that further reductions are unavoidable.

"Current budget conditions require the [adult division] to reduce its leases to an absolute minimum, and redirect lease savings to support classroom instruction" on district property or at a cost-free location, wrote Ed Morris, executive director of the district's division of adult and career education.

-- Howard Blume

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